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Canada National Parks Bureau

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Publications

Fort Chambly National Historic Park

Chambly, Quebec



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THE history of Fort Chambly goes back more than two and one-half centuries, to the period when the Government of France had decided to make the new country of Canada a Crown colony with at least some semblance of organized local Government. For thirty years the Company of One Hundred Associates had been on trial and had failed to fulfil the terms of its agreement with the Crown. Outside of Montreal, Quebec, and Three Rivers no man could hunt, fish or till the fields without peril to his scalp from the marauding Indians.

Accordingly, in 1661, Pierre Boucher, of Three Rivers, went to France to ask for assistance and protection from the terror of the Iroquois. He interviewed Colbert, the French Minister, who sent troops from France and the West Indies. It was then decided to build a chain of forts to be manned by these soldiers, and in this way Fort Chambly came into being.

The first Fort Chambly was built in 1665 by Jacques de Chambly, then a captain of the Carignan Regiment, and later the Commandant of Acadia. It was built of wood in the form of a square, one hundred and forty-four feet on each side, with palisades fifteen feet high. Within the walls were quarters for the soldiers, a chapel, and a warehouse for the storing of provisions, arms, and ammunition.

In 1702 the fort was temporarily abandoned by the military authorities and the Indians seized the opportunity to commit it to the flames. Partially destroyed, it was shortly afterwards rebuilt, though on a smaller scale.

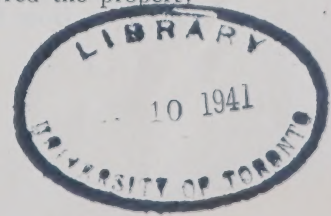
The inadequacy of the fort as a permanent means of defence led the authorities at Quebec, in 1709, to the decision that the fort should be finally abandoned. This however was not the view of the people of Montreal, for Chambly was the military key to that city, and the hostile English were then across the border. A great meeting was convened in Montreal and it was resolved to build a massive fortress on the old site that would adequately defend the approaches of the Richelieu River. The concurrence of the Superior Council at Quebec was obtained and representations were sent to France, urging the necessity of constructing an impregnable fortress of stone. The Government at Versailles was slow to act. The order for the work to be undertaken did not arrive until 1711, and by that time the impatient colonists had built the solid structure whose walls remain to-day.

In 1760 Fort Chambly was surrendered to the English and was held by them with a small armed force until 1775. In that year the Americans under Montgomery captured the fort but evacuated it in 1776, burning everything combustible and leaving only the walls standing.

The following year the fort was repaired and garrisoned by Sir Guy Carleton, the Governor-in-Chief of British North America.

During the War of 1812-14 it was utilized as a base of operations and at the close of hostilities housed for a time British soldiers who had served under the Duke of Wellington in the Spanish Peninsula.

Fort Chambly finally ceased to be a military post about the middle of the last century, when the Imperial authorities transferred the property to the Government of Canada.



In 1921 the fort was placed under the care of the National Parks Bureau and it is now administered as a National Historic Park.

The Museum at Fort Chambly contains many interesting exhibits. The following is a brief description of a number of the articles on display in the various cases:—

Case No. 1—Contains examples of handmade bedspreads and woollen blankets from Ile-aux-Coudres and nearby districts of the Lower St. Lawrence. These are from fifty to eighty years old. One of the blankets is made partly of cattle hair.

Ile-aux-Coudres lies about sixty miles below the City of Quebec. It was named by Jacques Cartier on account of the hazel nuts he found there. On September 7, 1535, the first celebration of the mass on Canadian soil was performed at Ile-aux-Coudres.

Case No. 2, Section A—Contains a checkered woollen blanket woven about sixty years ago at Ste. Anne de Beaupre, also a blanket made of shoddy which had previously been used; this was shredded and spun over and then rewoven.

Ste. Anne de Beaupre is on the north shore of the St. Lawrence, twenty-one miles east of the City of Quebec, and was first settled about 1657. It is famous throughout North America as a pilgrimage centre.

Case No. 2, Section B—Contains a variety of articles connected with handicrafts, as, for example, wooden tongs used in sewing leather, a form for the braiding of straw hats, a form for carding flax, a knife for cleaning flax, and a form on which to make mitts.

Most of these articles are from Chateau Richer, which is about fifteen miles northwest of the City of Quebec. The parish was founded by Bishop Laval in 1678 and was probably named after the priory of Chateau Richer in France, which is often mentioned in Laval's letters.

The old sleigh bells in this case belonged to a postman of the Beaupre Coast. The two hooked rugs came from St. Jean Port Joli.

Case No. 3, Section A—Contains an old crucifix with the figure made of bone; this is from Chateau Richer. The Corinthian capital and Modillion are from the church at St. Jean Port Joli, a village on the south bank of the St. Lawrence about sixty miles from the City of Quebec. In the church which dates from 1779, Philippe Aubert de Gaspé, the author of "Les Anciens Canadiens" is buried. His family were for many years lords of the seigniory of St. Jean Port Joli.

Case No. 3, Section B—Contains among other exhibits a goffering iron made about a hundred years ago and a sewing machine with chain stitch dating from 1865; these are from Chambly. The old beaver trap is from St. Paul l'Ermite. The candle moulds used in the making of tallow candles and the old lanterns for candles are from Chateau Richer. The casket displayed in this case was used for the filing of documents and was obtained from the Island of Orleans, which is situated in the St. Lawrence River, close to the City of Quebec. The Island was the home of some of the earliest settlers in Canada who came there from northern and central France soon after 1651. It was named in honour of the Duke of Orleans, son of the King of France.

Case No. 4, Section A—Contains a brass censer which is a good example of early Canadian workmanship; a crucifix with the figure made of lead, and moulds for lead obtained from the woodcarving shop of Louis Jobin. The small column displayed in this case originally formed part of the altar of the church at St. Jean Port Joli. The statue of an angel was carved at St. Romuald about 1860. St. Romuald is on the south shore of the St. Lawrence, four miles from Levis. It was formerly an important marine centre.

Case No. 4, Section B—Contains a cocked hat and two swords which were the property of Lt. Col. Charles Michel de Salaberry, the hero of the Battle of Chateauguay, which was fought on October 26, 1813. De Salaberry was born at Beauport in 1778 and died at Chambly in 1829. Beauport is five miles northeast of the City of Quebec and is one of the oldest communities in Canada, having been first settled in 1634. The County of Chateauguay lies south of the St. Lawrence River; the battle took place on the banks of the Chateauguay River.

It is understood that the tunic and the second cocked hat displayed in this case were the property of Major General John Wilson, who was appointed Administrator of Lower Canada in 1815 and was later in command of the troops in Upper Canada.

The breast plate, back plate, and armlets are examples of the type of armour worn by soldiers about the period when the first Fort Chambly was built.

Case No. 5—Contains a variety of military objects ranging from Indian arrow heads to the badges and buttons of Quebec battalions which fought in the War of 1914-18. Included are two old French axes which were found in the Fort and old bayonets found in the neighbourhood of Chambly.

Case No. 6—Contains military objects including a number of muskets and a flint pistol, most of these are about a hundred years old. It also contains cannon balls and military buttons found in or near the Fort.

Case No. 7, Section A—Contains examples of the woodcarver's art. There are pieces carved by Octave Morel, a woodcarver of the Beauport Coast; by Jean Baptiste Cote, who lived in Quebec, and by Louis Jobin. Some of the latter's tools are also displayed in this case.

Case No. 7, Section B—Contains specimens of pottery. Several of these are the work of Aurile Joubert of Baie St. Antoine, also known as Baie du Febvre, situated on Lake St. Peter, which lies between Sorel and Three Rivers. The lake, which is an expansion of the St. Lawrence River, was discovered by Jacques Cartier in 1535 on his second voyage. Other specimens are from the Dion pottery at L'Ancienne Lorette, near Quebec City, a parish which was founded by the Jesuits in 1673. It became L'Ancienne Lorette in 1697 when the Hurons founded Jeune Lorette.

Case No. 8, Section A—Contains three interesting statuettes, one of Louis Riel carved about 1875 by his Quebec contemporary, Jean Baptiste Cote; another represents an old voyageur, and the third the Virgin and Child. The two latter are over a hundred years old and are from Montreal and Quebec respectively. The clock displayed in this case dates from the year 1790.

Case No. 8, Section B—Contains domestic articles such as the coffee pot and bread tray from Chateau Richer, a pepper grinder made of wrought iron, a sieve used in making cheese, and a revolving dish used in the cooking of eels. The latter two articles are from the Island of Orleans.

Case No. 9, Section A—Contains two old candle lanterns from Quebec City, a rush mat used for drying cheese, and an axe of the type used by loggers; the latter is over a hundred years old and was made in Chambly. The hooked rugs with animal designs are from St. Jean Port Joli.

Case No. 9, Section B—Contains a checkered blanket from Chateau Richer, a striped blanket made of flax and wool mixed, which comes from Ile-aux-Coudres, and a bedspread also from the Lower St. Lawrence district. These are all about sixty years old.

The various chairs in the Museum were made by habitant craftsmen and date from about 1855. They are from Chateau Richer and St. Jean Port Joli.

The old chair placed between Case No. 8 and Case No. 9 is known as "the Rocking Chair of Grandfather Raphael" who was born in 1776. This comes from St. Jean Port Joli.

At the centre of the west wall of the Museum (opposite the main entrance) are the following exhibits:—

A cabinet made about a hundred years ago in the vicinity of Quebec. On this stands a wooden statue carved by Louis Jobin, the woodcarver who died in 1928, at the age of 83. From 1900 on, Jobin lived in Ste. Anne de Beaupre, prior to that he lived in Quebec City.

The spinning wheel on the left of the cabinet (used for flax) comes from the County of Beauce, while that on the right (used for wool) comes from the Island of Orleans and dates from about 1835.

The two fluted pilasters and the capitals, in the Corinthian style, were formerly in the nave of the Parish Church at St. Fereol. It is understood that originally these were from the old church of Ste. Anne de Beaupre (which is not far from St. Fereol) and were made about 1700 by the carvers of the Cap Tourmente School of Handicrafts founded by Mgr. de Laval, the first Bishop of Quebec.

On the wall between Case No. 3 and Case No. 4 is a carving in high relief, portraying Jacques Cartier at the helm of his ship. This is the work of Medard Bourgault, a woodcarver of St. Jean Port Joli. Jacques Cartier was born at St. Malo, France, in 1491. In 1534 he was commissioned by the King of France to make a voyage of exploration to the Gulf of St. Lawrence.

On top of Case No. 5 is a smaller case, in which is depicted a scene showing Cartier's ships approaching the Gaspé Coast. This also is the work of Bourgault.

At the centre of the North Wall of the Museum, between Case No. 5 and Case No. 6 is an old tabernacle. This is from the Parish of St. Sulpice, near Montreal, and dates from the end of the 18th Century. The Sacred Heart Statue which stands on the tabernacle was carved by Louis Jobin. On case No. 6 is a statue of a Bishop, carved by Louis Jobin.

Between Case No. 6 and Case No. 7 is a statue of the Virgin and Child. This is from the Parish of St. Laurent, north of Montreal, and presumably came originally from the old church of Notre Dame in Montreal. It was carved either by Liebert or Paul Labrosse, both of whom were Montreal woodcarvers in the 18th Century. On each side of the statue are church lanterns of the type used in processions. These are from St. Jean Port Joli.

The grandfather clock near the main entrance to the Museum dates from 1804. It was made by one of the Twiss brothers, American craftsmen, who settled in Montreal at the beginning of the 19th Century.

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